

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SANTIA 00937 112218Z

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ACTION ARA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2145

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 0937

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: CI, PINT, ELAB

SUBJECT: REPORTED DEATH OF UNION LEADER

1. BRITISH EMBASSY OFFICER RECENTLY CONFERRED WITH LABATT ON REPORT PUBLISHED IN LONDON "MORNING STAR" THAT JAVIER LEON, HEAD OF UNION AT SANTIAGO "SCHIFF FACTORY" (MANUFACTURER OF PLASTIC ARTICLES) HAD BEEN ARRESTED AND KILLED BY AUTHORITIES FOR LEADING STRIKE OF WORKERS. ACCORDING TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF REPORT, LEON'S BODY WAS LEFT IN FRONT OF HIS HOME SEVERAL DAYS FOLLOWING HIS ARREST.

2. ON CHECKING STORY WE FOUND SEVERAL PERSONS WHO HAD HEARD REPORT ON RADIO MOSCOW. MORE IMPORTANTLY, ACCORDING TO FRIENDS, UNION ASSOCIATES AND WIFE OF LEON, REPORT AS DESCRIBED IS BASICALLY TRUE. UNION ASSOCIATES TOLD US THAT SHORTLY AFTER LEON LEFT THE UNION OFFICE BEFORE MIDNIGHT ON EVENING OF FIRST WEEK NOVEMBER 1974, THEY HEARD GUNFIRE. AFTER SHORT TIME, THEY LEFT BUILDING AND FOUND NO TRACE OF LEON OR OTHERS IN VICINITY. LEON'S WIFE REPORTED THAT ON FOLLOWING DAY HIS BODY WAS DELIVERED TO HER HOUSE BY CIVILIAN-ATTIRED MEN WHO IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS GOC AUTHORITIES. WIFE SAYS THEY TOLD HER THAT LEON HAD COMMITTED SUICIDE.

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3. LEON WAS PRESIDENT OF UNION OF APPROXIMATELY 300 WORKERS

OF SCHIFF FACTORY AND NOT CONSIDERED A MAJOR OR NATIONAL LEADER. HIS COLLEAGUES CLAIM THAT THERE WAS NO STRIKE AT FACTORY OR EVEN REMOTE POSSIBILITY OF ONE, BUT THAT FOR SOME TIME PRIOR TO INCIDENT LEON HAD BEEN RELATIVELY ACTIVE IN PROCESSING NORMAL WORKER COMPLAINTS AND REQUESTS FOR IMPROVED CONDITIONS. SEVERAL ASSOCIATES CLAIM HE WAS POLITICALLY INDEPENDENT; APPEARS, HOWEVER, THAT HE WAS KNOWN COMMUNIST, ALTHOUGH NOT ACTIVE AS SUCH. ASSOCIATES CLAIM HE WAS NOT TYPE OF PERSON LIKELY TO COMMIT SUICIDE AND THAT THEY KNEW OF NO PROBLEM FACING HIM THAT WOULD HAVE LED HIM TO THAT STEP.

4. COMMENT: BASED ON TALKS WITH PERSONS IMMEDIATELY INVOLVED, IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT LEON DIED A VIOLENT DEATH LAST NOVEMBER. KILLING COULD HAVE BEEN MISTAKE, PERSONAL REVENGE OR SETTling OF ACCOUNTS BY GOC SECURITY FORCES OR OTHERS; OR PERHAPS LEON WAS INVOLVED IN SOMETHING UNBEKNOWN TO HIS ASSOCIATES AND WIFE. NEWS OF KILLING HAS NOT BEEN PUBLISHED LOCALLY, AND OUR SOURCES SPECIFICALLY STATE NO INVESTIGATION OF HIS DEATH HAS TAKEN PLACE. THIS IMPLIES SOME MEASURE OF OFFICIAL INVOLVEMENT.
POPPER

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